

21 C.J.S. Courts § 216

Corpus Juris Secundum | May 2023 Update

Courts

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VI. Rules of Adjudication, Decisions, and Opinions

B. Stare Decisis

3. Extent of Precedential Effect of Decision

§ 216. Similarity of facts

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While the doctrine of stare decisis relates only to legal principles, the authority of a decision is coextensive only with the facts on which it is founded.

The doctrine of stare decisis relates only to legal principles.¹ Only the legal rationale ("ratio decidendi") of an appellate opinion has precedential effect,² and precedents are valuable only to the extent they state definite rules for guidance in future similar cases,³ meaning those with similar factual settings,⁴ and can apply only in later cases in which the issues are similar.⁵ Thus, the language used in an opinion must be understood in light of the facts and the issue then before the court,⁶ and an unnecessarily broad holding is limited by the facts of the case in which it was articulated.⁷ Although a decision is binding in a later case if the issues and the facts are the same or substantially the same,⁸ it is not conclusive in a later case that has different facts⁹ except when the facts present an even stronger case than those in the former decision.¹⁰ In a case that must be determined upon its own particular facts, prior decisions are ordinarily merely advisory.¹¹

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Footnotes

¹ Ind.—*American Mut. Liability Ins. Co. of Boston v. Duesenberg*, 214 Ind. 488, 16 N.E.2d 698 (1938).

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- Tex.—Means v. Limpia Royalties, 115 S.W.2d 468 (Tex. Civ. App. Fort Worth 1938), writ dismissed.
- Cal.—People v. Mendoza, 23 Cal. 4th 896, 98 Cal. Rptr. 2d 431, 4 P.3d 265 (2000).
- La.—Harrah's Bossier City Inv. Co., LLC v. Bridges, 41 So. 3d 438 (La. 2010).
- Miss.—City of Greenville v. Laury, 172 Miss. 118, 159 So. 121 (1935).
- Neb.—Clark v. Hass, 129 Neb. 112, 260 N.W. 792 (1935).
- N.Y.—Sandberg v. Margold Realty Corporation, 256 N.Y. 228, 176 N.E. 175 (1931).
- Idaho—Eldridge v. Black Canyon Irr. Dist., 55 Idaho 443, 43 P.2d 1052 (1935).
- Ky.—Thacker v. Commonwealth, 228 Ky. 819, 16 S.W.2d 448 (1929).
- Okla.—State, for Use and Benefit of First State Bank of Wister v. Board of Com'rs of Le Flore County, 1936 OK 430, 177 Okla. 470, 60 P.2d 788 (1936).
- Wash.—Great Northern Ry. Co. v. Washington Elec. Co., 197 Wash. 627, 86 P.2d 208 (1939).
- Mo.—Wolf v. Wuelling, 233 Mo. App. 1144, 130 S.W.2d 671 (1939).
- Ohio—Voelkl v. Latin, 58 Ohio App. 245, 12 Ohio Op. 149, 16 N.E.2d 519 (2d Dist. Montgomery County 1938).
- Okla.—State, for Use and Benefit of First State Bank of Wister v. Board of Com'rs of Le Flore County, 1936 OK 430, 177 Okla. 470, 60 P.2d 788 (1936).
- Cal.—Elisa B. v. Superior Court, 37 Cal. 4th 108, 33 Cal. Rptr. 3d 46, 117 P.3d 660 (2005).
- Cal.—Covenant Care, Inc. v. Superior Court, 32 Cal. 4th 771, 11 Cal. Rptr. 3d 222, 86 P.3d 290 (2004).
- U.S.—Supreme Lodge, Knights of Pythias, v. Smyth, 245 U.S. 594, 38 S. Ct. 210, 62 L. Ed. 492 (1918).
- Ark.—Western Union Telegraph Co. v. Byrd, 197 Ark. 152, 122 S.W.2d 569 (1938).
- Idaho—State v. Cameron, 60 Idaho 619, 94 P.2d 782 (1939).
- Ky.—Davis v. Cumberland County, 269 Ky. 271, 107 S.W.2d 237 (1937).
- Mo.—Crews v. Kansas City Public Service Co., 341 Mo. 1090, 111 S.W.2d 54 (1937).
- Ohio—Groch v. Gen. Motors Corp., 117 Ohio St. 3d 192, 2008-Ohio-546, 883 N.E.2d 377 (2008).
- Okla.—State ex rel. Murphy v. Johnson, 1939 OK 313, 185 Okla. 651, 95 P.2d 99 (1939).
- Materially identical**
- U.S.—Midlock v. Apple Vacations West, Inc., 406 F.3d 453, 61 Fed. R. Serv. 3d 682 (7th Cir. 2005).
- Ark.—Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen v. Simmons, 190 Ark. 480, 79 S.W.2d 419 (1935).
- Ky.—Dix v. Carmack, 273 Ky. 844, 117 S.W.2d 1036 (1938).
- N.Y.—In re Liberman, 279 N.Y. 458, 18 N.E.2d 658, 122 A.L.R. 1 (1939).
- Okla.—Coats v. Riley, 1931 OK 758, 154 Okla. 291, 7 P.2d 644 (1931).

Or.—Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Co. v. Wallace, 158 Or. 210, 75 P.2d 942 (1938).

10 Iowa—State v. Carson, 185 Iowa 568, 170 N.W. 781 (1919).

11 U.S.—American Steel Foundries v. Tri-City Central Trades Council, 257 U.S. 184, 42 S. Ct. 72, 66 L. Ed. 189, 27 A.L.R. 360 (1921).

Ky.—Moran's Ex'r v. Moran, 248 Ky. 554, 59 S.W.2d 7 (1933).

Existence of negligence

Ark.—Smith v. McEachin, 186 Ark. 1132, 57 S.W.2d 1043 (1933).

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